

Guadalcanal fame. Under the focused spotlight of the national press, ultimately he was competing against himself and his desire for vindication.

These passages contain thrilling accounts of the Black Sheep's 1943 air war over the Solomon Islands, as well as the author's most controversial assertions and conclusions. Gamble raises very credible doubt that Boyington did not score the 28 aerial victories that have been officially sanctioned. He is academic and consistent in his appraisal of this subject, and ultimately it is up to the reader to decide the truth of this sensitive matter. Boyington's combat career ended when he was shot down and captured by Japanese forces in January 1944, spending 18 months in a prisoner of war camp before being repatriated. He was awarded the Medal of Honor.

The last chapters chronicle Boyington's postwar fall from national

hero to drunken disgrace, which can best be described as precipitous. Ostensibly discharged from the Corps for injuries received during his shootdown and captivity, the fact is that the social and professional impact of his disease was catching up to him. In subsequent years Boyington was unable to hold a job and joined in multiple failed marriages. His constant battle with alcoholism left him increasingly irritable and restless. He experienced a renewal of sorts during the run of the "Black Sheep Squadron" television series, which angered the surviving Black Sheep by portrayal of them as an ill-disciplined mob. The end finds him in hospice care emaciated and dying when two of his Black Sheep come to visit. "Ah, here's a couple of my boys, coming to say goodbye."

Well-paced, informative, and insightful, this book is an excellent

read. The researched stories of Boyington's exploits show that there truly was an "Old Corps," as such antics wouldn't be tolerated today. Gamble shows us the whole man, from start to finish, bringing to us the salient events that forged the essential elements of Boyington's character. We see how the flawed man and skilled fighter pilot grew into the legendary Marine who is now known worldwide as "Pappy." Anyone looking for insight into this iconic character would do well to read this book.

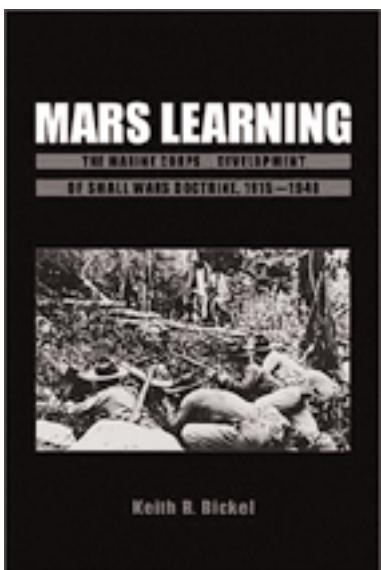


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## A Timeless Document

reviewed by Capt E.L. Jeep

**MARS LEARNING: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915–1940.** By Keith B. Bickel. Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 2001, 274 pp., \$29.00. (Member \$26.10)



In 1986 the *Small Wars Manual* was reprinted by the Marine Corps and res-

urrected as both viable doctrine and historical background. That a 46-year-old manual still had currency fascinated Keith Bickel, a student at the Johns Hopkins University and a Defense Department employee. Many hours of research and some years later, the result of this fascination was a doctorate and *Mars Learning*, his dissertation, published by Westview Press.

The good news is Mr. Bickel has done a real service to the Marine officer corps with his work. He has written a book that is so in keeping with the spirit of professional military education it could be an extension of the *Gazette*. It will someday be used as a textbook at Marine Corps schools. The bad news is, unless readers are clear about what the book is and what it isn't, frustration with its academic style could overshadow its importance. Knowing the true

subject of the book (easily confused) will enable the reader to understand the lengths to which the author went to make his point.

Though the book is important to Marines and it discusses Marine operations, it isn't about the Marine Corps. It's not about small wars or combat, even though it gives a wealth of details about techniques the Marines used in waging them. Closer to the point would be to say that it's about the manual itself. The book uses the manual's production as a case study for the real subject, institutional learning.

How do organizations decide upon courses of action and plan for the future? How do they learn and teach their profession? Does information from the field make its way back to new people? If so, how? Whose views are dominant, the field experienced or the theoreticians? Are there political considerations in tactics chosen?

In the military all of these issues are resolved one way or another and then promulgated as doctrine. In *Mars Learning*, the evolution and publication of one doctrine in particular, Marine small wars, is dissected in detail. Along with the detective work necessary to answer all of the above questions for the doctrine, we get a first-class treatise on the theory of military doctrine, its

hows and whys, rationales and pitfalls.

It's not the combat itself that interests the author, but the final resting place of its lessons learned. Even having said that, along the way there are more than enough thought-provoking operational details to interest Marines of any military occupational specialty.

Aviators will enjoy accounts of the first Marine air-ground task force, a March 1919 strafing mission that pushed Haitian bandits into ambushes set up on the ground, and stories of initial attempts at bombing using mailbags strung under aircraft. The effectiveness of certain infantry tactics is discussed as well. The relative merits of the shotgun and machineguns at the squad level, garrisoning versus long-distance patrolling, and further aspects of civil-military affairs were each a factor in the improvisation that led to doctrine.

Most accounts of operations will tell you what worked. One strength of *Mars Learning* is that it also tells some that didn't. Valuable political background

from the period is included, such as a court-martial of one officer for excesses in the field and congressional hearings on population redistribution, a tactic adopted and later abandoned.

Dissertations can be unusual writing. The text of a dissertation is more a record of professional research than it is a story line. Evidence yielded from research is used piece by piece to support a conclusion, which makes the text read differently than conventional histories.

For example, in *Mars Learning* the middle chapters are arranged by conflict, in chronological order. Each aspect of the small war is examined and repeated in each subsequent chapter. This makes the flow from section to section choppy.

Weighing in at 274 pages, some 50 pages of notes and 24 tables, maps, or figures, the book can be dense. The first chapter, titled "Terms of Art," is a theoretical underpinning of the study of doctrine. So, for the faint of heart, be advised. For serious students of the

Marine Corps or of doctrine, this is unlikely to be a factor.

It is a very well-timed book, coming as the Corps is paused once again at a crossroads, with defense reviews in Congress and the revolution in military affairs in full swing. The world has become small and nasty once again. Readers will find the book brings up essential questions for the future.

Are we the same type of officer corps as those who cut their teeth in small wars combat and later engineered amphibious doctrine, ensuring victory in the Pacific? Are we concerned with the same things as our forebears? In many ways the answer is yes, and strikingly so. In other ways we are not. I will leave to the readers of this unique book their own judgment.

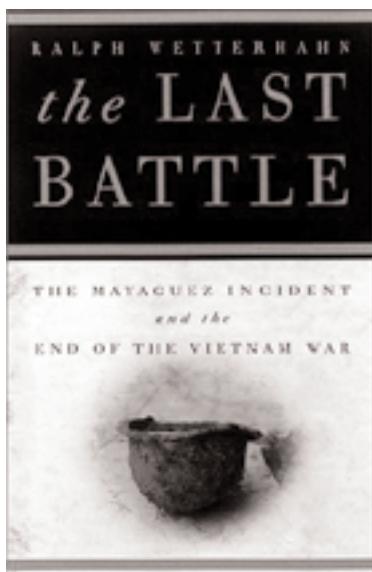


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## The Epilogue

reviewed by CSM James H. Clifford, USA

**THE LAST BATTLE: The Mayaguez Incident and the End of The Vietnam War.** By Ralph Wetterhahn. Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., New York, 2001, 384 pp., \$27.00. (Member \$24.30)



As the title indicates, most people refer to the *Mayaguez* incident as the last event of the Vietnam War. To many it is no more than the answer to a trivia question. Some know that the crew of a rusting hulk of a freighter was seized on the high seas by Khmer Rouge troops as it passed Cambodia on 12 May 1975. They know that President Gerald Ford acted decisively to mount a military operation that brought about the quick release of the crew of *Mayaguez*. They may know that a small number of U.S. servicemen died in the effort. However, they only know a part of the story.

In the 26 years since the event, memory of it has faded into a vague picture of what happened. Ralph Wetterhahn brings the *Mayaguez* incident

back to the forefront with clarity and a level of detail that should put this book in the company of the best military stories of our time. He first became interested in the incident while working on a magazine article in 1995. In the years since he has made several trips to Cambodia and to the scene of the battle to gather information, speak to participants, and observe the terrain. On some of these trips he accompanied members of Joint Task Force—Full Accounting on their recovery missions. On others he was on his own. He has also traveled throughout the United States in an effort to reach out to as many participants and survivors as possible. The result is an impressive book that not only reveals details, but also offers an analysis of the military, political, and social environment at the time of the incident. His judgment of the events is made more effective by the fact that he is also a Vietnam veteran, having served 180 combat missions in Air Force and Navy fighter aircraft.

The event occurred when Khmer Rouge troops seized the U.S. freighter *Mayaguez* off the coast of Cambodia in international waters on 12 May 1975. The Khmers had re-